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ABSTRACT

Doublespeak can be defined as language which is purposely ambiguous, deceptive, or evasive. If we want to promote integrity between act and word, we must teach by living out of the kind of consistency which we hope for in others. Functioning honestly in departmental and pedagogical as well as other personal dealings can be the most effective thing English teachers can do to counter the flood of doublespeak. By realizing that sender-message-receiver-context are intermeshed in complicated ways in the language act, students can study and avoid semantic abuses. Students can also explore aspects of the medium of language and discover ways in which the public is manipulated through language. The study of rhetorical principles can help students avoid using doublespeak while helping them recognize others' doublespeak. To ask students to write in certain highly artificial situations is to ask them to produce doublespeak. However, appropriate writing instruction in all the school years can help preserve students' authentic thoughts and emotions. Teachers should also work to develop students' media literacy skills so that students can begin to recognize and deal with public doublespeak. (HOD)

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The English Teacher and Doublespeak

(Paper presented at the Conference on English Education, Baltimore, March 26, 1973)

by Gloria Glissmeyer

In our context I'm taking Doublespeak to mean duplicity of speech. You might say that doublespeak is what is practiced by those "juggling fiends ...that keep the word of promise to our ear and break it to our hope." But Loren Eiseley's terms come closer, in The Night Country (48), when he talks of "half truths which we unconsciously accept, and which then take power over us. Under the spell of such oracles we create, not a necessary or real future, but a counterfeit drawn from within ourselves, which we then superimpose, through purely human powers, upon reality." I think it will be acceptable for us to define doublespeak as purposely ambiguous, deceptive or evasive language.

I'm assuming that each of us has experience and memory of language used in either purposely ambiguous or deceptive or evasive ways. For a systematic presentation there is Mario Pei's compendium of examples just published, his Double-Speak in America. In the face of such examples, both mine and his, I for one cheer the resolutions of concern passed at the NCTE convention in '71 and the recent organization of the NCTE's Committee on Public Doublespeak. I welcome this kind of involvement because I believe, with Maslow (The Farther Reaches of Human Nature, 44), that sicknesses of the soul can come from living among liars all the time and not trusting anyone. Metapathologies he called them. I believe also that sicknesses of the soul must come to doublespeakers themselves.

But before moving to ideas for our dealing with doublespeak, I want to make plain the spirit in which I think we can approach this situation. If we can I would like us to join with the returned POW who appealed

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to all segments of our society to forgive each other segment and proceed to concentrate together on the massive chores that we face together. Reies Tijerina, for another, realizes that hate can get out of hand, within a group and outside it. We all have identified instances of doublespeak and we have more than enough sense of its splintering hazards. So what we might do now is to proceed without more accusations and judgments, and let our enemies play at new ways of inhibiting further growth of doublespeak.

Now then, my first priority question revolves around a core of verbal wisdom, older than Kant's categorical imperative, but swinging in his orbit of a basic good will, of acting in a manner in which we would wish all other people to act, and of treating our own and others' humanity in every case as an end and never as a means only. I wonder, if we can face the full reality, if this question doesn't get us close to the heart of the matter, at the vital center that could make all the difference as to whether doublespeak would flourish in our land or not? Isn't the crucial intangible for us in education the total pattern of experience of each human involved? What people do IS frequently more important than what they say. The total pattern of what we do and what we say must have its full impact on our work in classrooms. Isn't doublespeak a divorce between language and action, between language and other reality? If in the classroom we want to promote integrity between act and word, must we not "teach" by living out as well as we can in our twenty-four hours the kind of consistency which we hope for in others? It seems like ordinary logic to assert that we can spin a fabric of communal integrity best with unflawed threads. So with our colleagues on the staff and in the classroom and with every single person in our twenty-four hours, I think the total pattern of our actions and their consonance with our overt expression does matter. If we "pledge allegiance to ... liberty and justice for all," the question is

what do we do in the classroom every hour and also outside class in relation to those words? The question is wouldn't it be an unprecedented age if a fair number of us could steer a course so that we could not accuse ourselves of doublespeak? It would come down to considering such things as Richard Knudson mentions in the current issue of English Education (102), like lecturing on the importance of not lecturing. You understand my conviction -- that our functioning as our authentic selves, thoroughly and throughout the day, in all our departmental and pedagogical as well as our other personal dealings, can be the most powerful process we are capable of initiating to counter the inundations of doublespeak.

Further, I think that we can help build an earth not characterized by the present separation between language and action if a good number of us can manage to follow our intimations regarding projects that flash across our consciousness as significant to our own and others' welfare, justice or growth. This was Chardin's word, his secret for the future of Homo Sapiens. Shakespeare's "readiness is all" has become for me in this context "awareness is all" and "consistency is all" -- consistency across thinking, saying and doing. According to Chardin, the mystery of Western development is a compound of harnessing reason to facts, and religion to action. Human effort is the secret in transforming formidable problems. The phenomenon of man depends on how we use our powers. At this point we have evolved not only to being able to perceive ourselves and our perplexities, but the life in us is free to dispose of itself. In action, Chardin says, lies the whole problem of whether we go the way of grandeur or servitude (The Phenomenon of Man, 198-225). Living with doublespeak is servitude.

Besides this most important general point, I would like to include some more specific suggestions in our thinking about how to prepare students for coping with commercial propaganda and semantic distortion in public use

of language. High on my list is bringing into consciousness certain things about the nature of language and nature of the language act. As Wendell Johnson made beautifully explicit in Your Most Enchanted Listener, the holistic aspect of the language act is that sender-message-receiver-context are intermeshed in complicated ways. I think that fact, if kept pervasive in our consciousness, can save us from little and large hazards, including semantic abuse by ourselves and others. We need to hold on to this image of this four-component situation. And besides the phenomenon of intricate interrelationship, I want also to affirm and repeat that the receiver and the sender of the spoken or written message remain separate humans, with their own nervous systems anf value systems, and therefore if I am in the receiving station, I am not obligated to take any message unconsidered.

In English classrooms could we explore aspects of the verbal medium that we are involved with such a large part of our days and nights, and touch on some other ideas that might prepare us all for growing beyond doublespeak? What about getting the Whorfian hypothesis into our thought patterns, so that we might keep alert to the continuing potential that our thought can be manipulated by language use, especially by language use which we take for granted? Ann Gebhard seemed to be touching this perspective in English Education, Fall (70), in quoting John Dixon's observation in Growth through English that future teachers "need help in realizing the full importance of language in society." John Ciardi is also occupied with this very point in a recent issue of World (February 26). He is concerned with hair-trigger mechanisms man knows little about. As he says, "the mystery of language is that it uses man as much as man uses it." That is the problem in doublespeak. Not only do lies help destroy intercommunication of men and forbid the dialog which Camus knew is essential for any program for the

future. Not only do lies and distortions pollute others in this way, but "language can set a man's total profession of himself." Doublespeak must have boomerang action and pollute the doublespeaker himself. So this could turn out to be a kind of Gandhian project, to rescue not only the victim but the executioner.

What about additional ideas for the curriculum? I believe that many of what we call rhetorical principles can help us and those in our classes avoid using language in the doublespeak style and also help to recognize such style in others. Some of the abuses in doublespeak are the confusion of fact and opinion, the repetition of words and ideas for devious ends, the absence of desirable definition, the use of abstract language unqualified by more concrete explanation or by examples. Therefore if we are thorough in attempting to distinguish fact from opinion, if we consider the possible significance of repetition wherever it appears, if we study the nature of definition and try to grow in sensitivity to necessities of definition, if we persist in looking for reasonable proportions of both concrete and abstract language, all of us should be more alert and more facile in recognizing and in amending tendencies toward doublespeak.

Another suggestion I would make in this stream would be for widespread implementation of writing instruction in all the years based on the notion that an important function of writing is to preserve one's authentic thoughts and emotions, not something that others should tell us to do. This would mean that we would not command but only be midwives in the process. This I know is a drastically revolutionary suggestion, but the idea has grown too strong not to be passed on. I do believe that it is a perversion of a natural and logical tool when we "teach composition" primarily from without, when we studiously follow procedures that work against speaking with one's

own voice. It seems that doublespeak is almost invoked in many instances in classrooms whenever we get students to write in artificially contrived situations and whenever we act as if we can consider form before content.

In addition to these ideas, I recommend Human Teaching for Human Learning, an introduction to confluent education, by George Isaac Brown. Several specific suggestions seem to me to be adaptable to our purposes. His group developed procedures for getting a serious sense of self (56a), for responsible individual reporting of fact (58c), for straightforwardly expressing feelings and intimation of others' feelings (78c), for practice at listening and responding as groups (66a) and as individuals in dialog (78-9), for becoming aware of one's unconsidered grouping habits (67c), and for understanding oneself as reader (71c). I am sure that these could be helpful and could generate further ideas of our own.

I am looking forward to our discussion period, when we can have an exchange of ideas. I have offered what is uppermost in my thinking right now, and hope that airing it will attract other contributions from all who are thinking to the same purpose. The NCTE went on record at the '72 annual meeting as favoring the teaching of television and radio evaluation in both elementary and secondary schools. If we pick this up and work at preparing prospective and current teachers for the task of developing evaluative skills for these media, we could be working at the problem of doublespeak at the same time.

As you see, I want us to go beyond asking if our aim is to teach Jody and Johnny to read or to become better persons. For me the word would be AND. Teach to read and write AND hopefully to become better persons. A similar thrust is evident in Richard Knudson's report (103-4) of his pioneering work with a teaching-learning inventory adapted from Eugene Dubois, which includes

learning new values, attitudes and interests. From across the country come similar sounds, in Warren Bryan Martin's report to the Joint Committee for Higher Education of the California legislature. Martin's assertion is that world problems are going to be solved only through collective action, through working together toward changing attitudes and interests (18, 39). He reiterates (vi,18, 26, 29) that procedural, structural and organizational changes to this end must be accompanied by changes in basic values, attitudes and orientations. That is our charge in relation to doublespeak.

> ... Were you thinking that those were the words, those upright lines?
> those curves, angles, dots?
> No, those are not the words, the substantial words are in the ground
> and sea,
> They are in the air, they are in you ... (Whitman)

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